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18 January 2012

Chief justice delivers 2012 State of the Judiciary address

Richard B. Teitelman, chief justice of the Supreme Court of Missouri, delivered the following State of the Judiciary address Wednesday morning, Jan. 18, 2012, during a joint session of the General Assembly in Jefferson City, Mo.

(Listen to [audio of the speech](#))

Mr. Speaker, Mr. President, Mr. President Pro Tem, Mr. Auditor, Mr. Attorney General, members of the General Assembly: Thank you for welcoming me here this morning. It is my honor to deliver this 39th state of the judiciary address. I also want to thank the staffs of the House clerk and the majority leader as well as our maintenance staff, who were kind enough to help make accommodations for me to be able to deliver this speech to you today.

As President Reagan once said, "There are no constraints on the human mind, no walls around the human spirit, no barriers to our progress except those we ourselves erect." My humble thanks to you.

I also want to thank you for your continued cooperation in working with our branch of government. I think the founders of our great nation would have been so proud of you and your predecessors in welcoming the chief justice and the governor into this beautiful chamber to talk with you each year.

In light of this week's recognition of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., I want to mention a true gem of the state – Frankie Freeman – a 95-year-old African-American woman who is being honored as the St. Louis Citizen of the Year and who has spent most of her 95 years marching as a true drum major for justice.

I was appointed to serve on the Supreme Court in 2002. I have been proud to serve there in the company of some of the finest jurists our state has ever known. I want to take a moment now to recognize my colleagues on the Court, who make every day of my job there special. I start by introducing to you our newest member, Judge George Draper III. Judge Draper – who is only the second African-American ever to serve on our state's high court – is from St. Louis, where he spent 11 years on the Court of Appeals, preceded by six years as a trial judge in St. Louis County, and before that, he served as chief trial attorney in the city's circuit attorney's office. Judge Draper, we are honored for the opportunity to serve alongside you. I also want to recognize Judge Ray Price, whose very big shoes I have to try to fill as chief justice; Judge Patty Breckenridge; Judge Zel Fischer; Judge Mary Russell and Judge Laura Stith.

It is important for me to mention all of these judges to you because the leadership for the judicial branch of government comes from all these fine men and women who are serving and who have served on the Supreme Court. I also would add my accolades to recognize our esteemed former clerk, Tom Simon, who retired at the end of May after serving with distinction for four decades as clerk of the Supreme Court of Missouri. Just to give you an idea of the kind of change Tom saw during his time at the Court ... the year he began his career, Richard Nixon was our president; you could buy a stamp for 8 cents, a gallon of gas for 40 cents and a movie ticket for \$1.50; Walt Disney World opened in Orlando; the NASDAQ debuted; and television advertising of cigarettes ended. During his career at the Court, Tom did much to cultivate relationships among our branches of government. His kindness and thoughtfulness

- September 2003
- The Missouri Bar/Judicial Conference annual meeting, Columbia, September 2010
- The Missouri Bar/Judicial Conference annual meeting, Kansas City, September 2002
- The Missouri Bar/Judicial Conference annual meeting, Kansas City, September 2005
- The Missouri Bar/Judicial Conference annual meeting, Springfield, September 2001
- The Missouri Bar/Judicial Conference annual meeting, St. Louis, September 2004

to all helped open dialogue and build friendships over time. We value those relationships. In his first inaugural address, Abraham Lincoln promoted a unifying focus on friendship and the things that bind us in affection by calling upon “the better angels of our nature.”

I remember sitting here in this chamber for the first time, listening to then-Chief Justice Steve Limbaugh Jr. giving his state of the judiciary address to your predecessors. As the grandson of former state Rep. Rush Limbaugh, he focused much of his time as chief justice talking about the honor of public service as well as the importance of those citizens we all serve. Thankfully, as he noted then, we don't have to do it all by ourselves. We have many judges in this state who serve not only their courts but also their local communities with dignity and integrity.

One judge in particular has been the source of much Missouri pride in recent months. Judge Jimmie Edwards, a circuit judge in St. Louis city, believed there needed to be an alternative to incarceration for juveniles who deserve a second chance through education. So in collaboration with 45 community partners, he took over an abandoned school and opened the Innovative Concept Academy in 2009. The academy, which serves as a “school of last resort” for at-risk youth between the ages of 10 and 18 years, recently has received a number of national accolades. People magazine named Judge Edwards as one of its 2011 Heroes of the Year, and the academy was featured on the Today show last month. But the academy's biggest success is that it has changed the lives of many young people, helping them to turn away from problems such as gang violence. So far, 18 students have earned their high school diplomas or GED, and two of them have gone on to college. Judge Edwards is here this morning along with some of his students. Would you please stand and be recognized? We could not be more proud of you!

Many court employees throughout the state went to Joplin following the disaster to help the courageous citizens of Joplin rebuild their lives and their community. Our hearts go out to everyone affected by this disaster – and our appreciation goes to everyone who lent a helping hand. Vince Lombardi said, “Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.” I am so proud to live in a state that works as well as it does because its citizens and public servants are so generous with their prayers and other assistance and are so willing to work together.

Much can be accomplished when, as Thomas Jefferson encouraged, we “unite with one heart and one mind.” We owe many thanks for the bipartisan effort to improve criminal justice to Speaker of the House Steve Tilley and President Pro Tem Rob Mayer – as well as Governor Jay Nixon and former Chief Justice Ray Price. I understand legislation soon will be introduced to implement the recommendations of a broad-based committee led by Sen. Jack Goodman and Rep. Chris Kelly. I support your efforts to help make sentencing practices more cost-effective, helping Missouri to become, as Judge Price stressed so often, both tough *and* smart on crime.

We also owe you many thanks for helping the courts with their efforts in the area of technology. The state court administrator's office has undertaken a remarkable cooperative effort to help make our records more accessible through electronic filing. If any of you want a demonstration of how the system works, just let us know, and we will be happy to show you!

A wise man once said the worst kind of death is being talked to death. As we come to the end of my speech, I am reminded by the quote carved into the dais behind me of the privilege of public service. That quote reflects our state motto, “Salus Populi Suprema Lex Esto,” which means, “Let the welfare of the people be the supreme law.” I look forward to working with you and getting to know many of you better throughout my time as chief justice. I am humbled to serve alongside you.

I also have learned the worst place to be is between a person and lunch. The Missouri Bar has been gracious enough to sponsor a lunch in the third-floor rotunda, with fried chicken and all the fixings ... and they've added for the first time – for a little bit of variety – knishes, a traditional Jewish dish. Enjoy!

Thank you. God Bless America!